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Hurricane coverage:

1 — State, EPA still assessing damage to waste pits, Baytown Sun, 9/10/2017

http://baytownsun.com/news/article_90930a5c-960f-11e7-af97-7330cd9dc83a.html?referer_url=/news/article_90930a5c-960f-11e7-af97-7330cd9dc83a.html

The U.S. EPA continues to survey portions of the San Jacinto River Waste Pits while making minor repairs in wake of Harvey. This week, EPA Remedial Project Manager Gary Miller was onsite overseeing the assessment of the protective cap that keeps toxic material contained from the San Jacinto River.

2 — EPA says no volatile chemicals found in water near Arkema plant in Texas, Reuters, 9/9/2017

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-storm-harvey-arkema/epa-says-no-volatile-chemicals-found-in-water-near-arkema-plant-in-texas-idUSKCN1BK0HV>

Water samples collected after an Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas caught fire following a power outage due to Tropical Storm Harvey contained no volatile chemicals, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Friday.

3 — Houston residents confront officials over decision to flood neighborhoods, Reuters, 9/9/2017

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-storm-harvey-water/houston-residents-confront-officials-over-decision-to-flood-neighborhoods-idUSKCN1BK0RJ>

Angry Houston residents shouted at city officials on Saturday over decisions to intentionally flood certain neighborhoods during Hurricane Harvey, as they returned to homes that may have been contaminated by overflowing sewers.

4 — From Texas to Florida, toxic sites risk flooding, PBS, 9/9/2017

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/texas-florida-toxic-sites-risk-flooding/>

Just two weeks ago, a line of reporting came out of Houston warning of the environmental dangers lurking at EPA Superfund toxic waste sites and what could happen after a catastrophic storm and flood. Well, those sites are not limited to Houston. They're in Florida, as well.

5 — Over 200 drinking water systems affected by Harvey still, Reuters, 9/9/2017

<https://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFL2N1LQ0G7>

More than 200 drinking water systems out of 2,238 affected by Tropical Storm Harvey are still shut or have notices for customers to boil water, state and federal regulators said on Saturday.

6 — Harvey updates: Orange County offices opening, Beaumont gets its water back, KFDM, 9/9/2017

<http://kfdm.com/news/local/harvey-updates-where-to-get-water-when-schools-government-offices-are-opening>

Governor Greg Abbott, Commissioner John Sharp of the Governor's Commission to Rebuild Texas, and heads of state agencies met with local officials at the Beaumont Municipal Court on Saturday.

7 — EDITORIAL: Fight flooding now, Houston Chronicle, 9/9/2017

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/editorials/article/Fight-flooding-now-12185716.php>

If the nation's fourth-largest city and the surrounding region are to emerge stronger and more resilient, we have to rethink, re-imagine and rebuild with the future in mind. We have to be better prepared for storms to come. And make no mistake: They will come.

8 — OPINION: Don't get back to normal, Houston Chronicle, 9/9/17

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Elliott-Don-t-get-back-to-normal-12185656.php>

In the wake of Harvey, Houston shouldn't get back to normal. The storm was indeed a historic event, but poor planning and governance significantly exacerbated the catastrophe: inadequate building codes that don't require flood resilience, zoning that puts residents and chemical plants in vulnerable areas and the paving over of prairies and wetlands that provide natural protection from floods.

9 — OPINION: Let Houston be Houston, Houston Chronicle, 9/9/2017

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Kotkin-Let-Houston-be-Houston-12185655.php>

To many, Houston's problems are the fault of no zoning and too much unregulated growth. The zoning argument is simply bogus. Cities in the area that were heavily zoned, like West University Place, or intensely planned, like Sugar Land, got hit just as hard as less-planned areas. Harvey was an equal-opportunity destroyer.

State, EPA still assessing damage to waste pits

By Christopher James christopher.james@baytownsun.com | Posted: Sunday, September 10, 2017 12:00 am

The U.S. EPA continues to survey portions of the San Jacinto River Waste Pits while making minor repairs in wake of Harvey.

This week, EPA Remedial Project Manager Gary Miller was onsite overseeing the assessment of the protective cap that keeps toxic material contained from the San Jacinto River.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott says state and federal environmental protection officials have found no major problems at all but two of 60 Superfund sites hit by Hurricane Harvey.

The governor says two sites — one in Pasadena and the other on the San Jacinto River — will require “additional precautionary assessment efforts.”

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality inspected 17 state Superfund sites. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assessed 43 other sites.

The EPA has designated the Superfund sites as being among America’s most intensely contaminated places.

Floods from Harvey have raised concerns the floodwaters may wash in pollution. Abbott said it is “imperative” the state work with the federal EPA to ensure the safety of people in those areas.

The San Jacinto Waste Pits site has a temporary armored cap designed to prevent migration of hazardous material. The EPA remedial manager is onsite and overseeing the assessment this weekend.

Crews continue to survey portions of the cap that are submerged. There are some areas where rock has been displaced and the liner is exposed. Also, the EPA has dive teams at the ready to survey the cap underwater if needed.

The cap was first installed in 2011 as a temporary solution. It consists of 59,000 tons of stone and thick protective layers of geo-technical materials that covers about 16 acres.

The EPA says some rock has been displaced, exposing some of the liner of the cap, but the potentially responsible (international Paper and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corporation) parties have mobilized heavy equipment and are placing rock on the armored cap to repair the defensive surface.

The EPA says the liner is in place and functional, which means they don’t have any indication that the underlying waste materials have been exposed. Even though two-thirds of the site is still under water.

“(On Friday) I observed workers in a boat on the northeastern edge of the pits poking the cap to look for damage,” said Jacquelyn Young, director of Texas Health and Environmental Alliance. “They were wearing very little protective gear which is concerning. On the northwest portion of the cap there was construction equipment moving rocks around.”

Although the cap undergoes regular monitoring and maintenance, it has received constant damage since being built in 2011. In fact the armored cap has required many repairs and extensive maintenance nearly every year.

From about 200 square feet of stone eroding in 2012, to five areas missing part, or all, armor stone with exposed geotextile in 2013, to 500 feet of cap missing or deficient in 2015.

Because of its past, environmental activists are finding it hard to believe that the cap wasn't damaged after the 500-year flood event that was Harvey. And they want facts to back up the EPA's claims.

"Advocates for removal have requested the EPA to survey the underwater portion of the pits prior to allowing the (responsible parties) to add more rock," said Young. "It's important this is done in the according order so damage isn't 'covered up.'"

Last Tuesday, Young, along with the Galveston Bay Foundation and Coastal Conservation Association, called on the EPA to permanently remove the waste as soon as possible.

They want the EPA to stay true to its proposed remedy of full remediation before another catastrophic event like Harvey happens again.

Since proposing the removal of about 152,000 cubic yards of contaminated materials, the EPA has been reviewing comments before finalizing the cleanup solution.

The EPA says they will announce its decision later this year.

For decades the waste pits sat exposed in the San Jacinto River unbeknownst to the community, contaminating the river with mercury, PCBs, furans and cancer-causing dioxins.

The pits, located just north of the Interstate 10 bridge between Highlands and Channelview, was used as a dumpsite for paper mill sludge from Champion Paper in Pasadena in the mid-1960s.

Once the site was filled to capacity, the company abandoned the pits and like the rest of the surrounding area the pits subsided, exposing the toxic chemicals to the San Jacinto River.

Since its discovery in 2005, the EPA has placed the site on its National Priorities List and oversaw completion of an armored cap (2011) to temporarily address the release of dioxin in the river.

For more information about the site, visit <https://www.epa.gov/tx/sjrwp>.

EPA says no volatile chemicals found in water near Arkema plant in Texas

Reuters Staff



FILE PHOTO: A fire burns at the flooded plant of French chemical maker Arkema SA after Tropical Storm Harvey passed in Crosby, Texas, U.S. August 31, 2017. REUTERS/Adrees Latif/File Photo/File Photo

(Reuters) - Water samples collected after an Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas caught fire following a power outage due to Tropical Storm Harvey contained no volatile chemicals, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Friday.

The Arkema plant experienced a series of fires as a result of sensitive organic chemicals that rose to dangerous temperatures after the facility lost power due to storm flooding.

People in a 1.5-mile radius around the plant, located about 20 miles (35 km) northwest of Houston, were evacuated after company officials said an explosion or large fire was likely because the organic peroxides used to make plastics and other products could not stay cool enough.

The EPA, in its statement, said that no “volatile organic chemicals or semi-volatile organic chemicals were detected in the surface water runoff samples,” which were collected on September 1.

The investigation, which involves the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and other state, federal and local agencies, is ongoing.

The first explosion took place on Aug. 31, several days after Harvey hit. The storm dropped several feet of rain in the Houston area.

Houston residents confront officials over decision to flood neighborhoods

Emily Flitter



A shopping cart and yellow tape are used to keep people away as the clean-up continues at a neighborhood shopping plaza following the aftermath of tropical storm Harvey in Houston, Texas, U.S., September 9, 2017. REUTERS/Mike Blake

HOUSTON (Reuters) - Angry Houston residents shouted at city officials on Saturday over decisions to intentionally flood certain neighborhoods during Hurricane Harvey, as they returned to homes that may have been contaminated by overflowing sewers.

A town hall grew heated after City Council member Greg Travis, who represents parts of western Houston, told about 250 people that an Army Corps of Engineers official told him that certain gauges measuring water levels at the Buffalo Bayou - the city's main waterway -

failed due to a decision to release water from two municipal reservoirs to avoid an overflow.

Travis' words inflamed tensions at the town hall, held at the Westin Houston hotel, as the region struggled to recover from Hurricane Harvey, which dropped as much as 50 inches (127 cm) of rain in some areas along Texas' Gulf Coast, triggering historic floods.

More than 450,000 people either still do not have safe drinking water or need to boil their water first.

On Aug. 28, the Army Corps and the Harris County Flood Control District opened the Addicks and Barker reservoirs in western Houston to keep them from overflowing. They warned it would flood neighborhoods, some of which remained closed off two weeks later.

Travis said the Army Corps official said they kept releasing water without knowing the extent of the flooding. "They didn't understand that the bathtub effect was occurring," he said.

Residents attempting to return to flooded homes may have to contend with contaminated water and air because the city's sewer systems overflowed during the floods. Fire chief Samuel Pena said people returning home should wear breathing masks and consider getting tetanus shots.

Machines are used to clean out a grocery store as the clean-up continues at a neighborhood shopping plaza following the aftermath of tropical storm Harvey in Houston, Texas, U.S., September 9, 2017.

REUTERS/Mike Blake

“We couldn’t survive the Corps - why should we rebuild?” Debora Kumbalek, who lives in Travis’ district in Houston, shouted during the town hall.

Scattered heaps of discarded appliances, wallboard and mattresses can be still seen throughout the city of 2.7 million people, the nation’s fourth-largest.

Clean-up continues at a neighborhood shopping plaza in the aftermath of tropical storm Harvey in Houston, Texas, U.S., September 9, 2017.

REUTERS/Mike Blake

There were no representatives from the Army Corps at the town hall. An official from the Army Corps could not immediately comment. An official from the Harris County Flood Control District did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Corps released water at an intended maximum rate of 13,000 cubic feet (370 cubic meters) per second to keep those reservoirs from overflowing. However, preliminary data from the U.S. Geological Survey suggests that on at least two days, the average release rate exceeded that 13,000 level.

Many residents face lengthy rebuilding processes, and the majority do not have flood insurance. The Federal Emergency Management Administration will contribute a maximum of \$33,000 per home in assistance to cover damages, a FEMA official said at the town hall, though for heavily flooded homes, damages will likely exceed that amount.

Fire chief Pena said homes may also be occupied by alligators, rodents and snakes due to the floods.

A total of 52 of the state's public drinking water systems were still damaged, inoperable or destroyed, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, leaving 70,000 people without water. Another 380,000 people need to boil their water.

#AFRICATECH

SEPTEMBER 9, 2017 / 1:22 PM / UPDATED 20 HOURS AGO

Over 200 drinking water systems affected by Harvey still shut or impaired -U.S.regulators

Reuters Staff



Sept 9 (Reuters) - More than 200 drinking water systems out of 2,238 affected by Tropical Storm Harvey are still shut or have notices for customers to boil water, state and federal regulators said on Saturday.

An additional 101 systems are still being contacted to “gather updated information of their status,” the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said in a joint statement.

Tropical Storm Harvey brought several feet of rain over a period of several days along Texas’s Gulf Coast, resulting in historic floods for the continental United States, hitting utilities like drinking water and sewage treatment.

The EPA and TCEQ said Saturday that 161 drinking water systems have boil-water notices, and another 52 are shut down. Of the 1,219 wastewater treatment plants affected, 40 are inoperable in the affected counts. The regulators also said 15 dams have been damaged out of 340 in the affected areas.

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Harvey updates: Orange County offices opening, Beaumont gets its water back

by KFDM/Fox 4



Flooding from Little Cypress flooding




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(/news/local/gallery/harvey-updates-where-to-get-water-when-schools-government-offices-are-opening#photo-2)

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SATURDAY, Sept. 9

Mauriceville lifts boil water notice

Mauriceville has lifted its boil water notice.

Texas Gov. Abbott comes to Beaumont

Governor Greg Abbott, Commissioner John Sharp of the Governor's Commission to Rebuild Texas, and heads of state agencies met with local officials at the Beaumont Municipal Court (<http://kfdm.com/news/local/watch-live-texas-gov-greg-abbott-speaks-at-beaumont-municipal-court>) on Saturday.

From the governor's office:

Governor Greg Abbott, Commissioner John Sharp of the Governor's Commission to Rebuild Texas, and heads of state agencies today met with local officials in Beaumont, TX to discuss the devastation left by Hurricane Harvey and how the Commission can assist in the rebuilding and recovery effort. During the meeting, Governor Abbott and Commissioner Sharp received an extensive update on the needs in Beaumont area, and spoke with local leaders on how the Commission will assist in helping affected communities.

"There is no doubt that the Beaumont area has suffered terrible devastation brought on by this storm, but the people are optimistic and strong as they begin the recovery process," said Governor Abbott. "I am proud of the commitment by the Commission to help Texas victims and their communities, and look forward to our continued work with local officials in these areas. We will not rest until Texas has made a full recovery."

Today's visit was the final stop of a three-day, five-city trip by Governor Abbott, Commissioner Sharp and leaders from state agencies to communities impacted by Hurricane Harvey.

Tekoa Academy to begin Monday, Sept. 11

Tekoa Academy of Accelerated Studies T-STEM School 327 Thomas Boulevard. Port Arthur will begin school Monday, Sept. 11.



Buses will run at regular time.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the school office at 409 982 5400. The office will be open Sunday, Sept. 10 from 1 p.m. until 3 p.m.

The school uniform policy has been temporarily suspended.

Orange County offices slowly resume normal business

Orange County Transportation will begin limited services on Monday, Sept. 11 between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for residents with necessary needs such as going to medical appointments or the grocery store.

Tuesday, September 12th the county will begin opening offices not impacted by the storm to the public. All offices in the Administration Building located at 123 S. 6th Street will open. These offices include the Tax Office, County Judge's Office, Treasurer's Office, the Auditor's Office, Social Services and Human Resources.

The County Clerk's Office and the District Clerk's office will be the only offices in the Courthouse to resume normal hours on Tuesday.

Other county offices that will be resuming business on Tuesday are Purchasing Department, Elections, Veteran's Office, Justice of the Peace Pct. 3, Juvenile Probation office in Orange, Environmental Health/Code Compliance, and the UTMB clinic. The Vidor Tax Office will be opening Tuesday also.

Adult Probation in Orange will open their offices Wednesday, Sept. 13.

As other County offices open, the public will be notified.

Beaumont city manager: Boil water notice lifted, but 'people are suffering'

After eight days without drinkable water, the boil water notice in the city of Beaumont has been lifted (After eight days without drinkable water, the boil water notice in the city of Beaumont has been lifted by the state's environmental agency as of Saturday at 1:11 p.m.) by the state's environmental agency as of Saturday at 1:11 p.m.

Bridge City curfew, post office, debris collection

The curfew hours are now 11 p.m. until 5 a.m.

The Bridge City post office is open normal hours (Monday-Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.). Mayor David Rutledge said it will take some time for all the mail to be sorted and delivered and asked for residents to be patient with the postal service until normal volume rates are reached again.

Debris should be piled on the house-side of the ditch, as far away from gas and water meters as possible, Rutledge said. The city is working with FEMA on debris collection and Rutledge said further details are hopefully available soon.

Also, for the benefit of city employees and contractors coming into the city, citizens should make certain their home addresses are easily read from the street.

The city of Beaumont narrowed down its water distribution from three sites to one, but this is no longer necessary with the city's water quality now approved by the state.

FRIDAY, Sept. 8**Orange County contractors, construction permits**

All contractors must get a county license to do any work on flood-damaged homes in the unincorporated areas of Orange County. Before hiring a contractor, please ask to see their "county license" or call the county at 409-745-1463 after Monday, September 11th to verify that the contractor is licensed. Beware of contractors requiring large payments before any work is completed.

Construction permits are **required** for all residents in flood zone areas. Permits will not be issued until FEMA required inspections have been completed. Residents will be informed when the inspections begin.

Permits in non-flood zone areas are also required. It is recommended that the moisture content on the studs be checked before a permit is issued.

Permit fees will be waived for construction due to damage from Hurricane Harvey.

Orange County mosquito abatement

Following requests for assistance, the Texas Department of State Health Services has agreed to provide aerial spray treatments to Orange County and others areas along the Texas Gulf Coast in an effort to help combat the high levels of mosquito activity and the threat to public health following Hurricane Harvey.

The State will be working with the DOD, Clarke Mosquito Control and Dynamic Aviation to provide aerial spray treatments to Orange, Jefferson and Chambers counties in addition to others areas along the Texas Gulf Coast.

Spray treatments are tentatively scheduled to begin Sunday, September 10th in Orange, Jefferson and Chambers County's. A military C-130 will be used to treat these areas. Aerial spray treatments will be carried-out beginning at dusk and into the evening hours. Insecticide to be used does not pose a threat to public health or animals. Beekeepers are being notified and need to be aware of the scheduled treatments so that they have the opportunity to either move their hives or cover them prior to treatment, if they choose to do so.

The mosquitoes which are causing high levels of nuisance to area recovery workers, residents and animals fall within the flood water group and do not transmit disease. However, because mosquito densities are so high, we cannot completely rule out the presence of some mosquito species, within those numbers, having the ability to transmit disease.

With mosquito populations high in the county, residents need to take personal protective measures when outdoors to protect themselves from mosquito bites. One of the first lines of defense against mosquito bites and exposure to mosquito-borne diseases is the use of EPA approved repellants containing products like DEET or picaridin when mosquito activity is present.

Other personal protective measures to reduce exposure to mosquitoes are moving indoors at dusk and dawn when many mosquito species are most active, wearing light colored loose fitting clothing as a physical barrier from the mosquito and draining standing water from property.

Free Tetanus shots in Chambers County

Monday, September 11:

5PM - 7PM East Chambers Junior High School

1931 TX-124

Winnie, TX 77665

Tuesday, September 12:

5PM - 7PM Whites Park Community Building



From Texas to Florida, toxic sites risk flooding

September 9, 2017 at 4:27 PM EDT

The Environmental Protection Agency said last month that in Texas, 13 of the state's 41 Superfund sites -- the nation's most toxic industrial waste sites -- had been flooded by Hurricane Harvey after the Associated Press reported about them on the scene. Now in Florida, 54 Superfund sites could be threatened by Hurricane Irma. Jason Dearen, the AP reporter covering the crisis in both states, joins Hari Sreenivasan from Miami.

HARI SREENIVASAN, PBS NEWSHOUR WEEKEND ANCHOR: Just two weeks ago, a line of reporting came out of Houston warning of the environmental dangers lurking at EPA Superfund toxic waste sites and what could happen after a catastrophic storm and flood.

Well, those sites are not limited to Houston. They're in Florida, as well.

Jason Dearen of "The Associated Press" has been on the same story the last couple of weeks and joins me now from Miami.

Jason, give us an idea of how many superfund sites are possibly affected by Irma?

JASON DEAREN, REPORTER, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS: Well, there are more than 50 superfund sites in Florida alone. In Miami, we have identified with the help of a 2012 EPA internal study, as well as an external study done by two researchers from American University, which of those sites are actually in the flood plain, so the most prone to flooding. And, since Wednesday, I visited six of those sites to see, you know, kind of how they appeared before the storm and what was being done, if anything, to prepare them for the expected storm surges, flooding and winds.

SREENIVASAN: And what is being done?

DEAREN: Well, the EPA told us they were securing the sites. They have staff who are monitoring them, checking in with people on the ground. When we went to them, they were in various stages of cleanup. So, you know, some had been cleaned up, and there's nobody around.

In one case, I found barrels of contaminated soil and water from one of the superfund sites that were still stored on the site. EPA said that they would be removing those barrels before the storm came when we called them. So, it depended on the site.

Another is, you know, a 2,000-acre Air Force base down in Homestead which is the lowest lying of all the superfund sites. It would only take about a foot of water to flood that. There are communities around there who could be impacted by that floodwater should it be contaminated from the Air Force base.

So, there are a lot of questions about just how these sites will handle the storm surge and winds from Irma.

SREENIVASAN: So, give us an idea of what makes a superfund site a superfund site? What kind of chemicals are we talking about? How dangerous are they?

DEAREN: They're superfund sites for a reason. They are all dangerous chemicals, some more than others. For example, the site I mentioned, Anodyne, which had the barrels out yesterday, had been contaminated with DDT, and other pesticides, chemical solvents. Many of the sites here in the Miami area had chemical solvents involved, usually in the aircraft industry, used to clean parts, things like that, and those were dumped into soil and down into the aquifer here in contaminated groundwater.

And so, that's one of the big concerns is when you have a lot of rainfall, storm surge, flooding is those chemicals being transported off the site, off the superfund site, down into the water and into the nearby communities. And so, that's what the EPA is going to be watching for, they say, and what we'll also be looking at.

SREENIVASAN: And how do they measure is that, especially if the barrels had been dumped years and years ago. We don't necessarily know how strong those barrels were, how watertight those barrels were and if the water kind of seeps down there during a flood, whether it kind of picks back up and goes somewhere else or it actually seeps down into the aquifer?

DEAREN: Well, each superfund site is different, right? So, some have contaminate mechanisms for the pollution, like a pond. So, for example, if that were to be breached, you know, that could spread contaminants. Some have a cap of clean soil over old — older, contaminated dirty soil. And, you know, the worry is if there is significant flooding that can be removed and all that commingling and moving off site.

In the case of these barrels, those barrels were new barrels. Apparently, somebody who works on the site told us that they had been filled within like the last month, last few weeks, by crews who were out, scooping out contaminated soil and taking tests of water beneath aquifer.

So, each site is very different, has its own complications, and it will take extensive close monitoring after the storm of each of these sites to see if the contamination has spread. It's a complicated and long-term project.

SREENIVASAN: As a result of some of your reporting out of Houston, the EPA came back and said to all reporters and everybody else, do not trespass on any of these sites. It could be incredibly dangerous and harmful to your own body and person.

The sites that you went to in Miami, were these closed off areas?

DEAREN: Most of them are closed off areas. One was a private business, and they were clearly marked "no trespassing". So, as far as we could to those fences, we didn't trespass by those fences. Others were not fenced off, and there were no "no trespassing" signs. In those cases, I just walked into them and took my photographs and interviewed people who lived or worked around there about their knowledge of the site, and if they've been, you know, if people had been in contact with them to warn them about any contamination concerns from the flooding.

SREENIVASAN: All right. Jason Dearen joining us via Skype from Miami, thanks so much.

DEAREN: Thank you.



Fight flooding now

State, local and national leaders can't delay in implementing this actionable list of policies.

September 9, 2017 | Updated: September 9, 2017 5:54pm

1

With the sun shining, floodwaters receding and attention shifting to another part of the country preparing to do battle with its own giant storm, it's easy to grow complacent about the knottier and more resistant challenges that confront Houston and southeast Texas in the wake of

Hurricane Harvey. Now that cleanup and reconstruction are in full swing, we must not lose focus on the long-range view.

If the nation's fourth-largest city and the surrounding region are to emerge stronger and more resilient, we have to rethink, re-imagine and rebuild with the future in mind. We have to be better prepared for storms to come. And make no mistake: They will come.

This is our "seawall moment," not unlike a time more than a century ago when our Galveston neighbors responded to the greatest natural disaster in American history by changing their form of municipal government, by literally lifting their city up and by raising a sturdy protective barrier that has stood the test of time. We must be just as farsighted and ambitious. In the spirit of Galveston's long-range view, we offer a dozen action items that we believe are vital if Houston and the region are to come back stronger, safer and more resilient than ever.

The list isn't necessarily comprehensive, but we hope it provokes an ongoing conversation among elected officials, business leaders, community activists, social-service providers, academics, charitable foundations, environmentalists, engineers – in short, every resident of the greater Houston area who cares about the future of this vibrant region.

1 .Establish a regional flood control authority

Floodwaters ignore city-limit signs and county-line markers. We can't adequately address drainage issues with a mélange of municipal efforts and flood control districts split between local jurisdictions. Instead of dividing these disaster-prevention efforts into provincial fiefdoms, we need a single authority with the power to levy taxes that will take charge of all of our area's

TRANSLATOR

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EDITORIALS

Fight flooding now



Thumbs up, thumbs down

Ovink: We can learn from the Dutch and work with nature

McKibben: Be part of the solution

Kotkin: Let Houston be Houston

drainage issues. Gov. Abbott should call a special session of the Legislature and set up such an authority.

Although we are skeptical about whether lawmakers obsessed with divisive social issues can turn their attention to urgent needs, establishing this authority requires action from Austin. Our governor and our Legislature need to get this done immediately.

2. Build a third reservoir

Addicks and Barker dams, reservoirs and spillways, constructed more than 60 years ago, are dangerously inadequate. The U.S. Corps of Engineers rated both as "extremely high-risk" infrastructure years before Harvey. Houston environmental attorney Jim Blackburn maintains that at least one new reservoir should be constructed in northwest Harris County that can help flooding along Cypress Creek, Bear Creek and Buffalo Bayou. He urges the construction of additional upstream locations on virtually every stream in our region.

Harvey shoved us uncomfortably close to catastrophe. We need a third reservoir, and probably more, to avoid unimaginable consequences the next time. Some experts estimate this could be a half-billion-dollar infrastructure project. It is a small price to pay to avoid catastrophe and should be part of any federal relief plan.

3. Build the coastal barrier system

If Hurricane Ike in 2008 had steered straight up the Houston Ship Channel, its powerful surge would have wrought catastrophic damage not only on the Johnson Space Center and the Bayport Industrial Complex, but also on the nation's economy. This area is responsible for more than half the nation's jet fuel and almost a third of its oil-refining capacity. It's also the leading supplier of energy products to the U.S. military. Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush has asked President Donald Trump to dedicate \$15 billion toward construction of a coastal barrier system that would protect the upper Texas coast from hurricane storm surges. It's time to stop talking about this project and get to work building it.

4. Buy the Westwood Golf Club

One of Houston's worst recurring flood problems may have a relatively simple solution. Phil Bedient, director of the SSPEED Center at Rice for Severe Storm Protection, contends that most of Meyerland would be protected from future flooding if the Westwood Golf Club along Brays Bayou was converted to a storm-water detention space. Harris County flood control officials must acquire this golf club and convert it into a detention pond. They should, if necessary, use condemnation powers.

5. Approve new funding streams

We need money. A lot of it. Current local budgets are inadequate to cover the costs of the massive infrastructure investment we'll need to keep this region safe from floods. The Harris County Flood Control District has a capital improvement budget of \$60 million per year. Mike Talbott, the district's former executive director, estimated that we need about \$26 billion for necessary infrastructure updates.

Potential funding sources include a Lone Star State version of the Dutch national tax for flooding abatement. The Dutch tax goes into that resourceful nation's comprehensive and innovative approach to flood protecting.

Other revenue-generating ideas: as we said above, create a regional flood control district to levy new taxes, as Harris County did after the deluges of 1929 and 1935; impose a countywide sales tax dedicated to flood prevention; and, of course, expand the drainage fee the Houston City

Council implemented in 2011 for a pay-as-you-go Rebuild Houston infrastructure plan (assuming it survives a state court challenge).

The Legislature should compel the unincorporated areas of Harris County, home to about 2 million people, to establish local municipalities that levy their own sales and property taxes. At the state level, Abbott's special session agenda must also tap the \$10 billion Economic Stabilization Fund, also known, appropriately enough, as the Rainy Day Fund, to help pay for one-time infrastructure expenses. The federal government's recovery legislation can be a resource to both rebuild what Harvey destroyed and establish new resiliency for regional flooding and storm-surge protection along the coast.

"Like the Dutch," Blackburn told the Chronicle, "we need to be willing to tax ourselves to raise the needed money. We have a solid industrial base. We have a generally wealthy and vibrant community. We can do this, but not without proper funding."

6. Require more effective land-use regulations

Adopting new regulations at both city and county levels to better control runoff would include restrictions on expanding impervious surfaces, investment in green infrastructure and stronger flood-detention standards. If the county refuses to act, politicians at City Hall should not be reluctant to use their authority in the extra-territorial jurisdiction to impose land-use regulations beyond city limits.

Prairies and wetlands in west and northwest Harris County must be preserved either through direct purchases or deals with landowners. New construction should be subject to higher building-elevation standards perhaps with detention ponds. The ploy of paving over Houston and putting up parking lots that are just under a 10-acre regulatory threshold to avoid mandatory flood-mitigation requirements is the sort of loophole our politicians must close. Houston also must reduce the need for impervious parking lots by lowering or eliminating parking minimums.

7. Reform the National Flood Insurance Program

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) must update its flood maps to better reflect the true risk, and cost, of living in a floodplain. Developers have a vested interest in keeping flood zones as small as possible to hide that risk and the eventual expense to owners. People and politicians must push back.

We cannot keep rebuilding homes that flood over and over again. Buyouts must take priority over repairs for "repetitive loss properties," where the federal insurance program has paid multiple claims within a 10-year span. Congress has to act to prevent federal flood insurance from expiring on Sept. 30, and our representatives can use the opportunity to implement much-needed reforms. Any change to the program should involve forgiving FEMA's \$25 billion debt to the Treasury.

The county and city must fill in the gaps for buyouts of routinely flooded properties not covered by FEMA. Local governments must also work to use reclaimed property in flood zones for both flood mitigation and functional urban greenspace.

8. Insist on a transparent Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers often serves as the most important line of defense between people and floodwaters, but a broken political system leaves far too many in the dark about what the Corps does. Local neighborhoods remain ignorant about Corps projects throughout the region and about the risks and threats posed by floodwaters. Just look at the homeowners surprised to find themselves flooded near Addicks and Barker reservoirs. People who deal with the Corps say that responsiveness varies by region.

Congress fails to maintain stringent oversight or proper funding for the Corps. Our elected officials, particularly U.S. Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz, have a duty to ensure that the Corps of Engineers is working to keep Houstonians safe.

9. Reinvigorate our politics

Harvey wasn't the first. Houston, Harris County and beyond have repeatedly had to deal with assorted natural disasters, including devastating hurricanes, and yet our elected officials are too

often unresponsive. At the county level and in other jurisdictions without term limits, we re-elect the same people for years, decades even, despite what seems to be their unwillingness or inability to respond to long-range needs. We urge local political parties to shake things up, recruit new candidates with fresh ideas and an eagerness to rattle the status-quo. We need engaged citizens who vote, who demand that politicians respond to real needs, not transgender bathroom restrictions.

At the federal level, gerrymandered congressional districts are unexpected contributors to flooding problems. The Corps of Engineers takes its direction from Congress, where U.S. Rep. Ted Poe's tadpole-shaped district stretches from the Addicks Reservoir to Atascocita and his colleague Michael McCaul's from Austin to the Katy Prairie. These sprawling, ungainly districts are drawn to reelect incumbents, not to reflect the interests of constituents. The politics of place, unfortunately, takes a backseat to partisan primaries. Texas needs a nonpartisan redistricting commission.

Speaking of responsive elected officials, Congress needs to restore earmarks. The tradition may have gotten a bad name over the years, but as our two Green congressmen - Al and Gene - have pointed out, earmarks are a useful mechanism for meeting local flood needs rather than relying on the parochial whims of an often recalcitrant Congress.

10. Protect renters

In addition to new infrastructure, we have to build economic resilience to help Houstonians, especially renters, weather the financial burden that floods impose. Apartments must be required to offer flexibility on rent payments and late fees during disasters. Leases must be easier to break for renters who endure a natural disaster. Property owners can't be allowed to discriminate against flood victims who rely on Section 8 vouchers to pay for new housing.

11. Help schools rebuild

Harvey cost the Houston Independent School District \$700 million in damages, Superintendent Richard Carranza says. Abbott should provide HISD the funding it needs to rebuild by calling upon the Legislature for a one-time payment from the Rainy Day Fund.

Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath should help by waiving the academic accountability ratings for public school districts and charter schools in counties declared disaster areas. A waiver will give ravaged campuses the opportunity to rebuild and to focus on the emotional needs of students. For a while, schools can do without the constant drilling students must endure to pass standardized tests.

12. Establish a national emergency website address

We need a national 911-style emergency information web address, a standard and easily remembered internet site where people can find up-to-the-moment intelligence on everything from road closures and rising floodwaters to web cameras and weather radar. FEMA needs to take the lead on this idea, establishing the web address and ensuring that county governments aggregate all their emergency data feeds on their local sites. Residents should rely of state-of-the-art technology and up-to-the-second information from government not from social media.

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Elliott: Don't get back to normal

By **Rebecca Elliott** | September 9, 2017

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In the days after a disaster like Harvey, as residents return to their homes, or what's left of them, they will want to get back to "normal." They will clean what can be salvaged, clear out what can't, fight mold, hang drywall and replace insulation. This impulse is entirely understandable. A flooded home is a disrupted sanctuary, and making it habitable again goes a long way toward restoring the ordinary rhythm of life.

In the wake of Harvey, though, Houston shouldn't get back to normal. The storm was indeed a historic event, but poor planning and governance significantly exacerbated the catastrophe: inadequate building codes that don't require flood resilience, zoning that puts residents and chemical plants in vulnerable areas and the paving over of prairies and wetlands that provide natural protection from floods.

For individual homeowners, not getting back to normal means treating Harvey as an opportunity to rebuild differently. If you can afford it, consider elevating your home at least as high as it flooded during Harvey. Move heating and cooling systems to higher floors. If possible, relocate to safer ground.

That's a tough job for individuals to do on their own, which is why city, state and federal assistance is so badly needed. FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, for instance, gives homeowners in flood-prone areas money to protect their houses, and should be expanded. The program already provides \$30,000 grants to some National Flood Insurance Program policyholders to elevate their homes, but that's only about a third of the full cost.

More money also should go to helping communities pursue buyouts, a policy implemented in some Staten Island neighborhoods that flooded during Superstorm Sandy. Those residents received the pre-storm value of their homes, plus a 5 percent bonus for those who stayed on Staten Island to avoid eroding the tax base that funds schools and other services.

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Fight flooding now



Thumbs up, thumbs down

Ovink: We can learn from the Dutch and work with nature

McKibben: Be part of the solution

Kotkin: Let Houston be Houston

Not getting back to normal isn't just a matter of how much we spend, but how we spend it. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, for every \$100 the nation has spent to rebuild homes through the National Flood Insurance Program, only \$1.72 has gone to helping people move out of harm's way. If we are going to continue to rebuild flooded homes with disaster relief, we should at least require tougher building standards as a condition of doing so.

Disaster relief gets flood victims back into their homes and back to normal. But a substantive disaster response—one that rejects "normal" in favor of better, smarter and safer—can prevent them from being flood victims again in the future. Disaster relief is an expression of our generosity to those who are suffering today. A disaster response signals a commitment to a more supportive society, in which we can all fare better as we face a future defined by climate change.

Elliott is a professor of sociology at the London School of Economics. Her book in progress, "Underwater," examines the politics and social effects of flood management.



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Kotkin: Let Houston be Houston

By Joel Kotkin | September 9, 2017

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Houston epitomizes one of the great American archetypes, the fast-growing boom town—a description that also fits places like Nashville, Charlotte, Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth and San Antonio. In recent years these kind of cities have attracted the bulk of new domestic migration, as well as a growing proportion of immigrants.

These cities aren't to everyone's taste. Some, particularly those who can afford it, prefer the highly regulated model of a San Francisco or Seattle, where decent housing is out of reach for most people, and where minority populations often are actually shrinking.

In contrast, Houston provides a beacon of opportunity for those outside the upper class. It also does much of the nation's dirty work. Some of my fellow Californians scoff at the Bayou City's ship channel, refineries and petrochemical plants, but they still rely on Houston's products to fill up their cars or fly off on vacation.

To many, Houston's problems are the fault of no zoning and too much unregulated growth. The zoning argument is simply bogus. Cities in the area that were heavily zoned, like West University Place, or intensely planned, like Sugar Land, got hit just as hard as less-planned areas. Harvey was an equal-opportunity destroyer. Similarly, the highly planned communities of greater New York suffered massive losses from Superstorm Sandy, which dropped barely a third as much rain as Harvey. New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina was dense and zoned-look how that turned out.

As Mayor Sylvester Turner has noted, if Houston had zoning he would be presiding over "flooded zoned city."

The Greater Houston region already has many regulations designed to protect the area from flooding, which has afflicted the city since its founding in 1836. After Tropical Storm Allison in 2001, more detention areas were built. Excellent emergency planning by the city and county allowed the region to survive a disaster that would have decimated many regions. To be sure,

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these efforts need to be scaled up considerably, given the probability of similar (albeit hopefully less drastic) rain events in the future.



No, Houston will never be pretty in the same way as San Francisco, Seattle or even Los Angeles. But it is not a concrete-laden collection of unpleasant communities, as claimed by many urban planning activists and their amen crowd in the media. Houston has more parkland and green space than any other large city in America, and ranks third (after San Diego and Dallas) in park acreage per capita.

Some are suggesting that Houston, following the lead of New Orleans, should stop growing and perhaps even shrink. But vibrant cities thrive from expansion, whether upwards, outwards or both. Houston needs to reform, but it also needs to remain Houston, not only for its own good, but for future generations seeking a dynamic, affordable place they can call their own.

Kotkin is a presidential fellow in urban futures at Chapman University in California and executive director of the Houston-based Center for Opportunity Urbanism.

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